

NEWS

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Leader of Camden Drug-Trafficking Gang Sentenced to 180 Months in
Federal Prison for Distribution of Heroin, Cocaine and Crack Cocaine

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CAMDEN – The leader of a notorious drug-trafficking gang that peddled heroin, powder cocaine and crack cocaine and protected its operations by threats and violence was sentenced today to 180 months in federal prison, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson also ordered Darnell Tuten, a/k/a “Big Lips,” 34, of Camden, to pay a \$10,000 fine and to serve 5 years of supervised release upon the completion of his prison sentence.

On April 15, 2004, Tuten pleaded guilty before Judge Wolfson to one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute one kilogram or more of heroin, five kilograms or more of powder cocaine and 50 grams or more of crack cocaine.

At his plea hearing, Tuten admitted that from October 2000 until March 2003 he supplied bulk quantities of heroin, powder cocaine and crack cocaine to many of his co-defendants and that those drugs ultimately were sold at various drug corners in Camden. Tuten also admitted that during the time frame of the conspiracy, he obtained supplies of cocaine and heroin from two Camden illegal drug wholesalers. Specifically, Tuten admitted he obtained approximately two kilograms of cocaine from Leonard Paulk, a/k/a “Pooh,” 37, of Camden and quantities of heroin and cocaine from Alexander Pellot, a/k/a “Lindy,” 54, of Camden. Paulk and Pellot were sentenced to life and 120 months, respectively.

Tuten cooperated with the federal government and testified at Paulk’s trial. Tuten testified that Paulk had supplied him with cocaine and that Paulk asked him to look the other way while Paulk attempted to kill rival drug dealer Jeffrey “Jazzy” Jones. Jones was warned by Tuten, which caused friction between Paulk and Tuten.

In sentencing the defendant, Judge Wolfson recognized a need to reward cooperation and send a message to the community on the importance of cooperating with the government. Judge Wolfson noted that had Tuten not cooperated he would have faced a potential sentence of a sentence of 30 years to life.

At sentencing, Judge Wolfson considered both personnel and general deterrence associated with the sentence. With regard to personnel deterrence, Judge Wolfson recognizing that Tuten was not deterred after his girlfriend was killed by those involved with Paulk. Judge Wolfson told Tuten that murder should have served as deterrence and state jail terms should have served as deterrence. Judge Wolfson said the sentence the court imposed recognized the value of cooperation. Judge Wolfson told Tuten that a sentence of 15 years is appropriate and strikes the right balance and takes into account the seriousness of his crimes and his rank in the organization.

In determining the sentence, Judge Wolfson consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, was not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI Southern New Jersey Resident Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge J.P. Weis in Philadelphia, Investigators with the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Acting Prosecutor James P. Lynch, Detectives with the Camden Police Department, under the direction of Arturo Venegas, Supersession Executive, the Camden County Sheriff's Department, under the direction of Sheriff William Fontanez, the New Jersey State Police, under the direction of Superintendent Joseph R. Fuentes; the DEA, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer; the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Sean F. Dalton, and the U.S. Marshal's Service, under the direction of U.S. Marshal James T. Plousis, with developing the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kevin T. Smith and Jason M. Richardson of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorney: Dennis Wixted, Esq. Camden